

[Mrs. Mary McNeill]

History

Edward Townsend, P. W.

Erath County, Texas.

District No. 8. [??]

No. of words 400

File no. 200

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A. Mrs. Mary McNeill, Fays.

In the spring of 1854, Dr. W. W, McNeill, a young M. D. in company with [Major?] B. Erath and John M. Stephen, with true Pioneer Spirit, these men set out in search of good location in the West and finding suitable land with plenty of grass, water and game they located on the spot now known as Stephenville.

Major [Erath?] and john M. [Stephen?] proceeded to lay off and survey the land, make maps, lay off city lots, farms and posture land. They laid off the city lot on which [Stephenville?] now stands and with maps and [plats?] sent to the Legislature of the State of Texas at Austin, submitting a proposition [that?] if they would create a county in this territory and locate the county [seat?] here, he as is owner of the John Blair Survey would deed to the public the streets and alleys. Also a block of ground for the court house, one for a jail and also a block for each of the churches, one for the Methodist, one for the Baptist and one for each the Presbyterian and Christian. These papers were sent to Austin

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July 4, 1855, and on January 25, 1856, the Legislature accepted the proposal and the county was created and named in honor of Major B. Erath.

The county seat also was named Stephenville in honor of John M. Stephen for his loyalty and his prominence in opening the way to civilization in this locality. (A)

Mr. Stephen built a double log house as did the other pioneers in the fall of 1854 and moved their families here. Mr. Stephen's family consisted of his wife and a daughter, Mary A., and two sons, James and Sam. Sam, the oldest sons was later killed by the Indians in one of their 2 wild raids. Lumber for a store, postoffice and for a union church was freighted by ox wagon from Waco.

These brave pioneers had to always carry their guns as they worked or worshipped to protect their families and stock from the savage Indians, who often ran in, murdering men, women and children and carrying off the horses and burning homes, and they all passed through many narrow escape.

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The young doctor married the only daughter of John M. Stephen, built a home and set out in his practice. By this union were five children to wit: John A. McNeill, now deceased, was the first white child born in Stephenville; James and Sidney, younger sons are still residents here.

The life of a pioneer physician is a peculiar, difficult one. No greater bravery is displayed by the soldier on the battlefield then the physician, who in the stormiest weather, was often called fifty miles or more from home, making the journey alone horse back, through forests and creeks with no sign of a road, with saddle bags across the horn of his saddle, and where every tree is a hiding place for the treacherous Indians ready to spring on them. On one occasion when the young doctor was returning from a long tripe where he had been called to see a very sick lady, he was attacked by the Indians, the arrows were flying thick

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and fast and one pierced the fine mare he was riding and laying her ears back against her head she ran with all her strengths carrying the doctor to safety but falling dead when she reached home. Dr. McNeill was born May 17, 1818, moved to Stephenville, Erath County, in 1854, was the first physician here, was a charter member and helped to organize the first Masonic Lodge in Stephenville; also was honored as Stephenville's first 3 postmasters. In the fall of 1854, with ten charter members, he helped to organize the first Methodist church, and was a faithful and honored member until his death at the ripe old age of 83 years. (A)